

# You can't make up this stuff

Volume 25

OK, kidlings, it's time for another edition of "Big Rob's You Can't Make Up This Stuff," the game based on my brother's theory that reality is stranger than any fiction you can imagine. As always we begin with an item from Big Rob's stomping grounds of Flint.

Flint has been trying to bring back its downtown area for years. Parking has always been an issue, but as seems to be par for Flint's course, they've taken a seemingly solvable problem and made things even worse. First, their theory was that people were not coming to downtown because they didn't want to put money into the parking meters, so Flint yanked out all 300 meters a few years ago. The people who worked downtown wound up taking all those available free spaces so any visitor who came downtown still had nowhere to park.

Next, they built a \$10 million parking structure so the people who worked downtown could park there, hence the 300 formerly metered spots would be available to the general public.

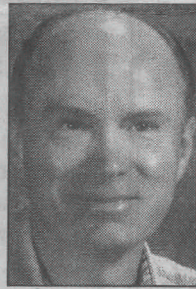
Around the same time, they passed a downtown parking ordinance so the Downtown Development Authority could ticket offenders. The problem is that they didn't foresee a loophole in the ordinance, to wit there was no parking violations bureau in the Flint District court in which people could appeal their tickets,

a crucial part of a person's right to due process. So, the bottom line is the tickets are worthless. City attorney Peter Bade told the Flint Journal, "If they crumple it up and throw it in the wastebasket, there is no enforcement mechanism in place."

It gets better. Guess who the worst offenders are. According to Flint attorney Erwin Meiers, most of the scofflaws are "attorneys, court employees and other workers." Meiers himself admits to \$250 worth of unpaid tickets. The city figures the downtown development authority has issued about \$70,000 worth of citations that have not been paid.

Now back to the parking deck, which no one uses. A \$620,000 payment is due on the bond used to finance the structure. Flint has \$900 in the fund designated to pay for the deck. So what's the answer? Why, reinstall 100 parking meters, that's what. And that, folks, is a prime example of something you just can't make up.

You know, Flint is not the only entity with money woes. For example, if you think televising the Winter Olympics is a sure-fire revenue generator, you would be dead wrong.



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NBC expects to lose \$250 million on the games. I guess luge and skeleton aren't big ratings draws after all.

The city of Huntington Beach, Calif., known to Beach Boys' fans as Surf City, is cracking down on drinking games at the city's bars. Restaurant owners are objecting because they think the ban will result in lower profits. You know, I thought you went to "Surf City to have some fun."

What will they ban next, "two girls for every boy?"

I guess Surf City will probably not want Burger King to open one of its new Whopper Bars in their fair climes. Whopper Bars will offer an assortment of burgers, but the kicker will be that they'll also sell beer. They'll charge \$4.50 for a cold Miller or Bud, beers that you can buy in a six-pack for around \$7 — what a deal!

Speaking of fun, the word on the street is that North Korea wants more American tourists to visit their garden spot of a country. You'd take the train from China and they're thinking of letting Americans stay beyond the current 5-day limit. Right now, if you stay a sixth day, you're in danger of being arrested as a spy and only a

diplomatic rescue mission will gain your freedom. Gee, I'll bet the hotels are top notch and tours of the illegal nuclear repositories or a visit to one of the 200,000 political prisoners would make for dandy activities. I can hardly wait for the ad campaign. Is "Pure Pyongyang" available?

Moving on to the realm of the inexplicable, my favorite Olympic story so far is that U.S. figure skater Johnny Weir is changing the fox fur on his costume to faux fur after receiving hate mail and death threats from animal right activists. Since kangaroo leather is one of the most popular materials used in the construction of figure skates, I can't wait for the activists to explain how those skates are made without harming the kangaroos.

Finally, you may think the discussions at the Wexford County Commission meetings get a bit weird at times. If so, then how would you have liked to have been at Whatcom or Skamania County meetings in Washington state when each passed ordinances protecting the Sasquatch? Both are now "Sasquatch Protection and Refuge" areas. In Skamania County, if you harm a Sasquatch, you get a \$10,000 fine and five years in prison.

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